

Trends in alcohol consumption and harm for young adults in Australia, 2001-2023

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Introduction: *Underage drinking and alcohol-related harms have declined steadily since the early 2000s, but only limited work has examined how alcohol consumption and harms have changed for young adults in Australia in the past two decades. This study analyses key national surveys and administrative data sources to provide a comprehensive snapshot of alcohol trends for Australians aged 15 to 29.*

Methods: *Survey-derived measures of risky drinking for men and women were analysed from three large national surveys (National Drug Strategy Household Survey, National Health Survey and Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia study). Alcohol-related injury and death rates were compiled from the National Hospital Morbidity Database and the Causes of Death Unit Record File, while rates of treatment for alcohol as the principal drug of concern were extracted from the Alcohol and Other Drug Treatment Services National Minimum Dataset for males and females aged 15 to 29. Trend analyses were conducted on all six data sources for data between 2001 and 2023.*

Results: *Across all three surveys, rates of risky drinking declined significantly for both men and women. For example, between 2001 and 2022/23, risky drinking in the NDSHS fell from 56% to 34% for men and from 38% to 25% for women. Over the same period, rates of hospital admissions also fell (by 48% for men, 18% for women), while treatment rates peaked in 2007/08 and then steadily declined. Alcohol-related injury deaths increased sharply, increasing by more than 200% between 2002 and 2020.*

Discussions and Conclusions: *While measures of consumption and less severe harms showed steady declines, alcohol-related injury deaths for young adults increased dramatically in Australia. Sub-populations of young Australians at risk of severe harms need to be identified and linked with interventions that reduce the risk of injury and death linked to alcohol. Survey trends may not tell the complete story when considering long-term changes in how alcohol impacts Australian society.*

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